

PROTOCOL

of the Seventeenth Working Group Meeting
under Project 02.05-61, "Marine Mammals,"
under Area V of the U.S.-Russia Agreement on Cooperation
in the Field of Environmental Protection
Listviaynka Settlement, Irkutsk Region, Russia.
September 15-19, 2002

The Seventeenth U.S.-Russia Marine Mammal Working Group Meeting, Project 02.05-61, was held in Listviaynka, Irkutsk Region, Russia during September 15-19, 2002, under the cochairmanship of Valeriy A. Vladimirov (Russia) and Thomas R. Loughlin (U.S.), the Project Co-Leaders.

Representing the Russian side were: Valeriy A. Vladimirov (Delegation Leader), Stanislav E. Belikov, Aleksandr M. Burdin, Vladimir N. Burkanov, Vladimir I. Chernook, Nikolai V. Doroshenko, Sergei I. Kornev, Aleksei E. Kuzin, Vladimir V. Mel'nikov, Evgeniy A. Petrov, Gennadiy P. Smirnov, Anatoliy I. Stus, Andrei I. Testin, Aleksei M. Trukhin, Sergei V. Zadalskiy, Sergei V. Zagrebely, and Mikhail Yu. Zasyplin

Representing the United States side were: Thomas R. Loughlin (Delegation Leader), John L. Bengtson, Robert L. Brownell, Donald C. Calkins, Brian S. Fadely, Chadwick V. Jay, Brendan P. Kelly, Steven G. Kohl, Rosa H. Meehan, and Anne E. York.

The meeting was opened by Dr. Valeriy Vladimirov, who jointly with Dr. Thomas Loughlin welcomed the participants of the working group and extended their appreciation to the organizers of the meeting and other contributors of financial support, which made this meeting possible.

CETACEANS

Drs. Burdin and Brownell reported on research results on the western gray whale populations on the Piltun feeding ground off Sakhalin Island between 2001 and 2002. They noted that the calving interval of seven of 17 known adult females increased from 2 years to 3 years. They also noted that the number and distribution of pods observed from the Piltun lighthouse were similar between pre and post seismic surveys of the Odoptu oil field in the north, but significantly different (the whales move south) during the surveys in the north.

Dr. Vladimirov suggested the need for the development of a Russian national integrated program for monitoring and research of the Okhotsk Sea gray whale population, with special reference to a study of the potential impact of technological factors associated with oil and gas development on the northeastern Sakhalin shelf, which is also near the feeding area of this gray whale population. He also discussed the feasibility of involving Japanese, Korean, and Chinese specialists in order to determine the migration route and wintering grounds of these gray whales.

Dr. Burdin provided information on killer whale surveys in Avacha Bay in 1999-2000.

Dr. Doroshenko reported on the results of a ship-based survey of cetaceans in the coastal waters of the Okhotsk Sea in September-October 2001.

Dr. Mel'nikov reported on studies of bowhead whale migration in the waters of the Chukotka Peninsula carried out in 1999-2001 under a joint Russian-American program.

Mr. Smirnov reported on the results of ship-based and aerial surveys of whales in the Gulf of Anadyr and Bering Strait. He also reported on telemetry and genetic studies of beluga whales in Anadyr estuary carried out by Russian, American, and Canadian biologists, as well as the results of monitoring the native subsistence harvest of gray whales in Chukotka.

Dr. Brownell reported on the planned special meeting sponsored by the IWC during October 2002 considering the Korean/Okhotsk gray whale population.

Dr. Brownell noted that dedicated right whale surveys in the southeastern Bering Sea were started in 1998 and have continued each year for monitoring purposes. These whales are the most endangered large whale population in U.S. waters. During 2002 a female with a calve was seen in the southeast Bering Sea during summer surveys.

SEA OTTER

Mr. Zagrebelny reported on studies of the age and sex composition of sea otters that were found dead on Bering Island 1995-2001. He reported that, in his opinion, the Bering and Medny island subpopulations of sea otters are currently stable and that their abundance is between 3300-3600 and 1500-1700 animals, respectively.

Dr. Burkanov reported on studies conducted on killer whale predation on sea otters and other marine mammals in the Commander Islands carried out in 2002 by several Russian and American agencies.

Dr. Meehan reported on sea otter aerial surveys in the Aleutian Islands during 2000 and noted a decline of 71 % between 1992 and 2000. Annual boat-based surveys at representative islands in the central and western Aleutian Islands show the same pattern and magnitude of decline. Aerial surveys along the Alaska Peninsula and Kodiak Archipelago showed similar declines during 1992-2000 for an overall decline of 55% for this southwestern stock of sea otters from the mid 1980s to the present.

PINNIPEDS

EARED SEALS

Dr. Kuzin reported that the fur seal population of Robben Island is recovering from stagnation after the depression of the 1970s and 1980s. In 2002, it was estimated to number 88,000 individuals and 26,400 pups.

Mr. Stus reported that the Commander Islands population of fur seals is stable and its overall abundance is estimated at 200,000-220,000 individuals. Apparently its current abundance is at a maximum from the point of view of its carrying capacity.

Ms. York reported on the results of northern fur seal population status and trends at the Pribilof Islands and San Miguel in summer 2002 conducted by the National Marine Mammal Laboratory (NMML).

Dr. Burkanov reported on Steller sea lions studies on the Kuril Islands, Kamchatka Peninsula, and Commander conducted in 2001-2002 sponsored by the NMML and Alaska SeaLife Center.

Dr. Zadalsky reported on studies of the population status and migration of Steller sea lions in the northern Okhotsk Sea in 2001-2002, which showed a decrease in abundance in the Yamski Islands.

Dr. Kuzin reported that the reproductive population of Steller sea lions on Robben Island is increasing every year and its average growth over the years is more than 20%. In 2002, more than 1200 adult sea lions and 433 pups were counted on Robben Island.

Mr. Calkins discussed 23 research projects on the western stock of sea lions conducted by the Alaska SeaLife Center, Seward, Alaska. In 2001 and 2002 funds were provided for sea lion surveys in the Kuril Islands and Okhotsk Sea, orca research, and a video observation study at Kozlova Cape.

Dr. Loughlin reported results of Steller sea lion population status in Alaska during 2002 and summarized sea lion studies at the NMML.

TRUE SEALS

Dr. Trukhin presented brief information on Russia-American harbor seal research in Bristol Bay, Alaska in September 2001. He also reported on the results of continuing studies on largha seals in Peter the Great Bay, Sea of Japan, where the number of pups born in 2002 remained at the average level observed in past years.

Dr. Chernook and Mr. Stus reported results of experimental aerial surveys of ice breeding seals in the Okhotsk Sea in 2001.

Mr. Smirnov reported the resumption of true seal studies at Chukotka by the Chukotka Division of the TINRO Center.

Dr. Kuzin reported on largha seals at Robben Island which, by their ecological, behavioral, and morphological features, can be considered a terrestrial form (not the pagophilic form).

Dr. Bengtson discussed current and planned studies at the NMML to estimate the abundance of harbor seals throughout their range in Alaska. This work is comprised of aerial surveys as well as covariate models to estimate the proportion of seals not counted during aerial surveys to account for tide, date, time, and substrate types to derive a total population estimate for Alaska, which is currently about 180,000.

Dr. Bengtson reviewed aerial surveys of ice-breeding seals in the Chukchi and Bering seas conducted in 1999, 2000, and 2001. He hopes to expand these studies to include satellite tagging of ringed, bearded, and ribbon seals.

Dr. Kelly described his ongoing study (1999 -2003) aimed at correcting aerial surveys of ringed seals for the proportion of seals unseen, because they are under the ice or in subnivean lairs (snow caves). The seals' transition from resting in lairs to resting outside of lairs, where they are visible, varies greatly from year to year depending mainly on snow conditions.

WALRUS

Mr. Smirnov reported the results of Russian-American studies of Pacific walrus on Chukotka which showed a gradual decline in abundance in coastal haulouts, and an increase in the proportion of males at haulout sites and in subsistence harvests in the Gulf of Anadyr.

Dr. Meehan reported on a proposed comprehensive walrus survey using aerial or mark/recapture techniques (e.g., DNA signatures as the mark). Both satellite and thermal data could be useful in an aerial survey, especially the thermal techniques which are compatible with those developed by Dr. Chirnook. A survey is planned for 2004, pending development of appropriate techniques. The survey will require the deployment of satellite transmitters or collection of tissue samples.

Dr. Meehan stressed the importance of gathering both Russian and US subsistence harvest data and recommended continuation of an annual meeting to exchange these data. A workshop is planned for 2003 to identify additional information from subsistence harvested animals on their physical condition and contamination level.

Dr. Jay reported on recent walrus research, including the use of satellite transmitters during 2001 in Anadyr Gulf. Plans for future transmitter deployments in Russia are pending results from trials of a new deployment technique, remote deployment by crossbow, which will be conducted during 2002-2003 in the U.S. Also, preliminary results of a population genetics study are expected by 2004.

Dr. Kelly briefly described surveys of the age and sex composition of walruses conducted along the ice edge of the Chukchi Sea. Dr. Kelly conducted such surveys with the late Dr. Fay in 1982 -1985, and Dr. Kelly and other colleagues surveyed again in 1998 and 1999. In all of those samples, the proportion of adult females accompanied by calves was very low.

MISCELLANEOUS MARINE MAMMAL ISSUES

Mr. Smirnov reported on socio-economic studies of Native subsistence whaling designed to determine the quota of whales needed by the Native people. Results of the study were used to convince the IWC that such a quota is needed. This study was carried out in 2000-2001 by the Chukotka Branch of TINRO and the Institute of the Biological Problems of the North (Macadam), with the active participation of the Native peoples of Chukotka.

Dr. Mel'nikov stated that the aboriginal people of Chukotka (Russia) depend on marine mammals, including gray whales and bowhead whales, for nutrition, a source of cultural vitality and spiritual integrity. Joint Russian-U.S. studies addressed the economic, social and cultural status of Native households and their relationship to marine mammal harvesting. This work has been carried out since 1998.

Therefore, the Marine Mammal Working Group recommends that the relationship of Native households of Chukotka to marine mammal harvesting continue to be studied. Also, there should be a standardization of methods for the collection and analysis of information with international standards. In particular, studies of gray whales need to be continued and expanded to include the collection of tissue and organ samples to provide information related to population health.

This work is currently being carried out by the Chukotka Administration, the Association of Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters, Chukotka Science Support Group, Institute of the North (Alaska Pacific University), Barrow Arctic Science Consortium, The North Slope Borough, Alaska-Chukotka Development Program (University of Alaska) and Alaska Regional Office of the National Park Service.

Dr. Kornev reported the results of studies of incidental take of marine mammals during commercial fishing in the waters of the Russian Far East and recommended that specialists keep attention focused on this problem.

Dr. Zasyplin reported on the existence of a large collection of teeth and bones of marine mammals at the Northeast Integrated Scientific Institute of the Academy of Sciences (Magadan). These teeth and bones were found during archaeological excavations of an ancient town on the coast of the Okhotsk Sea and proposed conducting joint studies on these teeth and bones.

Dr. Fadely reported that US Steller sea lion foraging ecology studies would like to include Russian study areas and recommended that development of Russian satellite transmitter technology consider data compatibility with equipment used in US studies.

Drs. Meehan and Vladimirov discussed the protocol and permit actions needed to allow US vessels to enter Russian waters and for the use of US equipment in Russia during joint studies. Further, Dr. Vladimirov informed the workshop participants that proposed joint and Russian national programs for study of marine mammal species, whose status is threatened or endangered, must be submitted in advance to the Ministry of Natural Resources for its endorsement; programs of study for species not listed are sent to the State Fisheries Committee for review.

PROPOSED JOINT WORK

RUSSIAN SIDE:

The Russian side proposes conducting the following joint research on marine mammals in 2003 and 2004. These projects will be further coordinated by the participants and will be subject to availability of funds and technical opportunities.

CETACEANS

The Chukotka Branch of TINRO invites 2-3 American scientists to take part in biological studies on beluga whales in the Gulf of Anadyr (Chukotka) in July-August 2003 or 2004.

The Kamchatka Division of the Pacific Institute of Geography invites 2-3 American scientists to participate in cetacean shore-based surveys in Kamchatka and the Commander Islands (July 2003 and 2004).

The Kamchatka Division of the Pacific Institute of Geography invites 3- 4 American scientists to participate in gray whale studies in the waters of northeastern Sakhalin (July-October 2003 and 2004).

The Kamchatka Division of the Pacific Institute of Geography invites 2-3 American scientists to participate in bowhead whale studies in the waters of the Shantar Islands (August-September 2003 and 2004).

The All-Russian Scientific Research Institute of Nature Conservation (VNIIPRIRODY) invites one American scientist to take part in the capture and tagging of beluga whales in July-August 2003 for up to 3 weeks in the Lena River Delta, Ob River Bay, or estuary of the Pechora River.

The Pacific Oceanological Institute of the Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences invites 3-4 American scientists in June through October 2003 and 2004 for a joint study of the organs and tissues of gray whales collected in the Native subsistence harvest of Chukotka.

The Pacific Oceanological Institute of the Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences invites 3 American scientists for a few weeks in 2004 for a joint study of the needs of Native people of Chukotka for whaling products.

SEA OTTERS

The Kamchatka Division of the Pacific Institute of Geography and the Commander State Nature Reserve invite two American scientists for joint studies of sea otter foraging ecology and mortality on Bering Island (March-August 2003 and 2004).

PINNIPEDS

EARED SEALS

The Kamchatka Division of the Pacific Institute of Geography invite up to six American scientists to take part in sea lion studies on the Kamchatka Peninsula, Kuril and Commander islands (May-September 2003 and 2004)

KamchatNIRO invites 1-2 American scientists in June-July 2003 to take part in the deployment of transmitters/TORs on female fur seals on the northwest haulout of Bering Island.

KamchatNIRO invites 1 American scientist to take part in a comprehensive survey of marine mammals (sea otter, Steller sea lion, fur seal, true seals, and others) in southern Kamchatka and the Kuril Islands in June-July 2003 or 2004.

SEVVOSTRYBVOD invites 1-2 American scientists to survey and tag sea lion pups on rookeries of Kozlova Cape (Kamchatka) and Medney Island (Commander Islands) in June-July 2003 and 2004.

TRUE SEALS

The Kamchatka Division of the Pacific Institute of Geography invites 1-2 American scientists to take part in field work on the capture and tagging of ribbon seals in Kamchatka in 2003-2004 (precise dates to be determined).

The Chukotka Branch of TINRO invites 1 American scientist to take part in a telemetry study of ringed seals in Chukotka in September-November 2003.

WALRUS

The Chukotka Branch of TINRO invites 1-2 American scientists to take part in Pacific walrus studies between June and August 2003 or 2004.

SEVVOSTRYBVOD invites 1-2 American scientists to take part in ship-board and land-based surveys of Pacific walrus on haulouts on northeast Kamchatka and Chukotka in July-September 2003 or 2004.

VNIIPRIODY invites one American scientist to take part in the capture and tagging of Atlantic walrus in the Pechera River estuary in July-August 2003 or 2004 for up to 3 weeks.

U.S. SIDE:

(The following proposals should be considered tentative, subject to the availability of funds.)

SEA OTTERS

The Alaska SeaLife Center invites 4 Russian sea otter specialists to participate in sea otter investigations in Alaska. Two are invited in 2003 and two are invited in 2004.

PINNIPEDS

EARED SEALS

The U.S. side invites 1-2 Russian scientists for 3 weeks to participate in the capture of Steller sea lions in Alaska during February/March 2003 with the NMML.

The U.S. side invites 1-2 Russian specialists for 3-4 weeks to conduct northern fur seal population monitoring and foraging ecology studies on the Pribilof Islands during the third quarter of 2003.

The Alaska SeaLife Center invites 4 Russian sea lion specialists to participate in sea lion investigations in Alaska. Two are invited in 2003 and two are invited in 2004.

TRUE SEALS

The NMML invites two Russian scientists to explore multi-spectral remote-sensing methods that would be suitable over broad survey areas for detecting ringed seal under-snow lairs and breathing holes. In particular, it is hoped that Dr. Vladimir Chernook, Knipovich Polar Research Institute for Marine Fishery and Oceanography, Murmansk; and Dr. Stanislaw Belikov, All-Russia Research Institute for Nature Protection, Moscow; will be available to develop a more detailed study plan and, contingent on available funding, to implement this work in 2003 and 2004.

The University of Alaska Southeast invites two Russian specialists to participate in a telemetric study of ringed seals in the Beaufort Sea of Alaska for 2 to 3 weeks in April and May 2003.

WALRUS

The USFWS invites five walrus harvest coordinators to Nome in 2003 and five in 2004 to discuss harvest monitoring methods and exchange reports from the previous year.

The USFWS invites Dr. Vladimir Chernook, Knipovich Polar Research Institute for Marine Fishery and Oceanography, Murmansk to visit Anchorage in May 2003 to evaluate thermal imaging data collected in the Bering Sea.

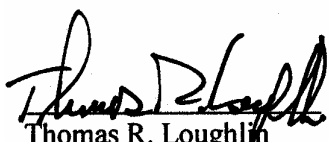
The USFWS invites two Russian scientists to a meeting in February 2004 to coordinate a proposed walrus survey in 2004.

The U.S. Geological Survey, Alaska Science Center, invites 1-2 Russian scientists to participate in field work to deploy transmitters on walruses during spring and fall of 2003 in U.S. waters of the Bering or Chukchi Seas.

The U. S. side extends its heartfelt appreciation to the Russian side for its hospitality and proposes to host the next (18th) meeting of the Marine Mammal Working Group in the U.S. in 2004.

Signed in Listviaynka Settlement, Irkutsk Region, Russia September 19, 2002 in the English and Russian languages, both texts being equally authentic.

For the American Side:



Thomas R. Loughlin
National Marine Mammal Laboratory
Project 02.05-61 Co-Leader

For the Russian Side:



Valeriy A. Vladimirov
VNIRO
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